
Glossary

Glossary of Planning and Land Use Terms

Area-Specific Plan: These plans provide a finer grain of analysis than a citywide Master Plan and may be prepared for a block, a neighborhood, a business district or a larger area. They may be undertaken in response to a development proposal or as a proactive planning study. Area-specific plans establish a specific mix of uses and building types, roadway alignments, design treatments and necessary public facilities and amenities needed to make a neighborhood a success. Standards and guidelines that ensure continuity with the valued characteristics of existing development to be retained are also provided.

Auto-Oriented: Commercial development along major arterial(s) and in other suburban style shopping centers that gives little recognition to the needs of the pedestrian, cyclist and transit users. Some other characteristics of auto-oriented development include large parking lots located between commercial buildings and the street, signs scaled to catch motorist attention and multiple driveway curb cuts that can create safety conflicts.

Best Management Practices (BMP): With respect to stormwater management, BMP are methods to control and minimize the adverse impacts of development and redevelopment through the application (or prohibition) of construction, maintenance or managerial practices to prevent or reduce the release of pollutants into streams, creeks and watersheds.

Block Face: The abutting properties on one side of a street between the two nearest intersecting or intercepting streets, or nearest intersecting or intercepting street and railroad right-of-way, unsubdivided land, watercourse or city boundary.

Board of Zoning Appeals: (Zoning Appeals Board) An official board whose principle duties are to hear appeals and, where appropriate, grant variances from the strict application of the zoning ordinance.

Brownfield: Brownfields are abandoned, idled or underused industrial and commercial facilities where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination. The definition is broad and can cover an entire industrial zone or a single abandoned building, a massive hazardous waste dump or spillage from a corner dry cleaning shop.

Business Improvement District (BID): A special district established to provide services to a business district that go beyond the level of services provided by the local government. These services often include extra maintenance, improved street lighting or beautification, promotional activities and special events. About 1,200 BIDs have been established in cities throughout North America. At least a part of the funding for a BID is usually raised through special assessments, a fee paid in addition to the property taxes paid to support regular city services.

Commercial Land Use: Activity involving the sale of goods and services carried out for profit. Commercial uses may be small in scale, such as a corner store, or may be as large as a regional shopping mall and vary in intensity. Other uses typically considered as commercial include: retail shops, restaurants, hotels, entertainment, offices and a range of personal and professional services.

Community Oriented Government (COG): COG strives to form partnerships that are developed in the community to provide a mechanism for proactive identification of issues and the dedication of resources to address problems. The focusing of energy and resources to address root causes of prob-

lems in addition to the symptoms, resulting in a more efficient use of resources.

Community Resource Team (CRT): There are three Community Resource Teams for the city these are: North/West; Central; and South. These interdepartmental teams are charged with the responsibility of implementing community-oriented government in Grand Rapids.

Connectivity: The way in which individual developments and uses are physically linked together within the larger fabric of a city. Most often refers to the network of streets and blocks and the way in which they encourage or discourage walkability and concentrate or distribute traffic. Other examples of connectivity include: the availability and location of transit routes and stops, bike routes, and other off-street pathway.

Core (of a Mixed-Use Center): A mixed-use area that includes: shops, services, offices, restaurants, entertainment, civic and residential uses in buildings that are oriented to the street. Mixed-use cores also include transit stops, public spaces for shared activities, a connected street system that defines small blocks designed for walkability, with linkages to surrounding neighborhoods. A range of housing types for people of different incomes is encouraged.

Cores and Connectors: A strategy for strengthening Traditional Business Areas by concentrating retail uses in mixed-use cores to create shopping destinations linked by connectors of higher density housing and residentially scaled office (with possible first floor retail) that increase the population density within walking distance of the core(s).

Day-Lighting: The opening of creeks, rivers and other water courses that may be covered, or submerged underground.

Development Center: City consolidated service center which brings together staff from Building Inspection, Engineering, Planning, and Zoning to more efficiently and effectively meet the needs of developers, builders and trades people.

Downtown: The largest, most intensively developed, mixed-use center within the Grand Rapids region, containing government offices, service uses, professional, cultural, recreational, entertainment, residential, hotel and retail uses.

Downtown Development Authority (DDA): A public authority established in 1979 to promote development and fund improvements in Downtown Grand Rapids. Most funds come to the DDA through tax increment financing. Many of the significant improvements completed in Downtown over the past 20 years have been completed with the support of the DDA, including Plaza Towers, Grand River Walkways, Monroe Center Improvements and the VanAndel Arena.

Downtown Improvement District (DID): A Business Improvement District established for Downtown Grand Rapids in October 2000 and initiating activities in spring 2001. The DID provides maintenance and beautification, promotions and communications, special events and neighborhood development services.

Economic Development Team: Members of the City of Grand Rapids staff that deal with economic promotion, job creation and business retention in the city as well as the management and disposition of city-owned property.

Edge (of a Mixed-Use Center): The portion of a mixed-use area located adjacent to an existing single family neighborhood that creates a transition in residential densities and building scale.

Fixed Guideway Investment: An investment in a mass transit facility which utilizes and occupies a separate right-of-way for the exclusive use of mass transit and other high occupancy vehicles.

Future Land Use Classifications (as used in the Master Plan):

- **Low-Density Residential** – An area designated for housing developed at a density of 1 to 4.9 dwelling units per gross acre.
- **Medium-Low-Density Residential** – An area designated for housing developed at a density of 5 to 9.9 dwelling units per gross acre.
- **Medium-Density Residential** – An area designated for housing developed at a density of 10 to 14.9 dwelling units per gross acre.
- **High-Density Residential** – An area designated for housing developed at a density of 15 and more dwelling units per gross acre (14 to 20 units per gross acre desired with 40 units per gross acre the absolute maximum).
- **Commercial** - An area designated for retail business or service establishments that supply commodities or perform services. Any activity involving the sale of goods or services carried out for profit, including for example, retail shops, restaurants, hotels, entertainment, offices and a range of personal and professional services.
- **Downtown** - The regional mixed-use center of the Grand Rapids metropolitan area; containing government offices, service uses, professional, cultural, recreational, entertainment, residential, hotel and retail uses.
- **Office** – A sub-category of commercial land use, designated for the conduct of the affairs of a business, profession, service, industry, or

government in buildings generally furnished with desk, tables, files and communication equipment.

- **Industrial** – An area designated for the manufacturing, compounding, assemblage or treatment of articles or materials.
- **Institutional** – An area designated for for-profit and nonprofit, religious or public use, such as a church, library, public or private school or college, hospital; or a government owned or operated building, structure, or land used for public purpose.
- **Mixed-Use** – An area designated for the development of a combination of complementary and integrated uses; such as, but not limited to, residential, office, manufacturing, retail, public or entertainment, in a compact urban form.
- **Traditional Business Area** - Typically located along transit routes, TBA areas are designated for a mix of civic and retail uses at street level, with apartments and/or offices on the upper floors of multi-story buildings. A TBA generally has structures that are built on the front property line and have shared side walls (or are built with minimal side yard setbacks). The buildings are typically 2 –3 stories in height and sit on relatively narrow lots. Off-street parking is limited or located to the rear of the building. As a result, TBAs create a human-scale and pedestrian-friendly environment where retail, jobs and services are available within easy walking distance from many homes.
- **Parks/Green Space** - A tract of land, designed and used by the public for active and passive recreation.

Future Land Use Descriptions: The portion of the Master Plan that describes planned land uses and areas for change. The descriptions illustrate what types of land uses are appropriate within a given geographic area, points for consideration, and desired outcomes for the future. The text describes the Future Land Use Map, and supersedes the map in instances where clarification or interpretation is required.

Grand Valley Metro Council (GVMC): The Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC) is an alliance of governmental units in the Grand Rapids, Michigan metropolitan area that plans for growth and development to improve the quality of life and coordinate governmental services. The GVMC is also the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for transportation programs in the Grand Rapids area.

Grandfathered: A use, building or structure which does not conform to the use and/or dimensional standards of the zoning ordinance but which existed prior to the effective date of the ordinance, or amendment thereto. Such use shall be considered a non-conforming use or structure for purposes of the ordinance.

Greenfield: Greenfields are undeveloped properties where new development is proposed or occurring. Typically, greenfield sites are active or idle farmland with limited development restrictions or site constraints that allow for cheaper, quicker development than in a previously developed location.

Heavy Industrial: Business activities that tend to generate more noise, dust, odors, and/or glare than a general commercial or light industrial use. Examples include: concrete manufacture, asphalt manufacture, chemical manufacture, plastics manufacture, soap manufacture, heavy construction contractors and equipment and materials storage, processing of

junk; i.e. salvage yard, foundry and metal process and stamping fabrication.

Historic District: An area or group of areas not necessarily having continuous boundaries, that contains one significant historic resource or a group of resources that are related by history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture.

Historic Preservation: The identification, evaluation, establishment, and protection of resources significant in history, architecture, archaeology, engineering or culture.

Historic Resource: A publicly or privately owned building, structure, site, object, feature or open space that is significant in the history, architecture, archaeology, engineering or culture of the State, a community or the United States.

Impervious Surface: Any material that prevents absorption of stormwater into the ground.

Infill Development: The development of new housing or other buildings/uses on scattered vacant sites in a built-up area.

Inner Ring (of a Mixed-Use Center): The portion of a village or sub-regional mixed-use area located between the “core” and “edge” zones. Uses within this inner ring may include medium and high-density residential developments, larger footprint retail uses (i.e. a grocery store or cinema), larger freestanding office buildings, other work places with a high employee to floor ratio (including technology and certain light industrial uses), medical clinics, schools and churches.

Institutional Land Use: A nonprofit, religious, or public use, such as a church, library, public or private school, hospital, or government owned or operated building, structure or land used for public purpose.

Interurban Transit Partnership (ITP): Formerly the Grand Rapids Area Transit Authority (GRATA), formed in January 2000 by the cities of Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker and Wyoming under the Act 196 of the Public Acts of the State of Michigan. Commonly known as “The Rapid.” The ITP was formed to allow for the expansion of public transit in the Greater Grand Rapids area.

Land Uses: The purpose to which a parcel of land is being put. Examples of uses include: residential, commercial, industrial and recreational.

Light Industrial Land Use: Industrial uses that meet the performance standards, bulk controls and other requirements established in an ordinance. These uses are generally defined in terms of intensity and impact, with light industrial uses being more intensive than most commercial uses, but less intensive than heavy industrial.

Master Plan: A comprehensive, long-range guide for the future growth and physical development of a community. State enabling act requires a valid zoning ordinance to be based on an adopted master plan. The purpose of the plan is to promote public health, safety and general welfare, as well as quality of life.

Master Plan Committee: Citizen committee of 31 individuals appointed by the Mayor representing diverse interests to oversee the Master Plan process. The Committee will report its recommendations for the Master Plan to the City of Grand Rapids Planning Commission.

Mixed-Use: The combination of different types of land uses such as residential, commercial, office, industrial and/or institutional into one building, area or project. Mixed-use redevelopment promotes comprehensive revitalization through retention or addition of housing, services and jobs.

Mixed-Use Centers (see earlier definition(s)) - A mixed-use area that includes: shops, services, offices, restaurants, entertainment, civic and residential uses in buildings that are oriented to the street. Mixed-use cores also include transit stops, public spaces for shared activities, a connected street system that defines small blocks designed for walkability, with linkages to surrounding neighborhoods. A range of housing types for people of different incomes is encouraged.

Natural Features (Systems): Land forms (hilltop, slope, valley); rivers, creeks, wetlands and natural vegetation are examples of natural systems that can be incorporated in – rather than erased by – development to preserve what is unique about an area and to maintain a visible connection to the natural environment.

Natural Infiltration: The absorption of stormwater runoff into the ground.

Neighborhood Business District: A business district that provides goods and services to meet the daily needs of the immediate neighborhood.

Neighborhood Business Specialists Program (NBSP): City program that has assigned specialists specifically to service the needs of the city's neighborhood business areas and associations.

Neighborhood Mixed-Use Center: A pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development, located on a transit line, that serves as the focus of a single neighborhood or several neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Plan: (see *Area-Specific Plan*)

New Urbanism: A movement to build and rebuild communities on a human scale – with interconnected streets, homes with porches, pedestrian friendly traffic patterns, shared open spaces and green ways, local retail businesses that are near hous-

ing and services and construction practices that are environmentally sensitive.

Nonconforming Use: A structure or use that is not permitted in the zoning district in which it is located, but which is permitted to continue with restrictions because the structure or use predates the designation of the zone.

Planning Commission: Body of 9 members appointed by the Mayor. The Planning Commission is responsible for overseeing the physical development of the community and formal adoption of the Master Plan.

Regional Mixed-Use Center: See Downtown

Renaissance Zone: The Michigan Renaissance Zone Act was created by the State of Michigan in order to foster economic opportunities; facilitate economic development; stimulate industrial, commercial and residential improvements; and prevent physical and infrastructure deterioration of certain geographical areas in Michigan. In Grand Rapids the Renaissance Zone is composed of several distressed and blighted industrial and commercial areas within the core city. There are few residences within the Grand Rapids Renaissance Zone. Qualified businesses or residents in the Renaissance Zone are relieved from payment of state and city income taxes as well payment of most property taxes.

Residential Land Use: A building or parcel of land used for housing. This can include detached one-family housing units, or multifamily arrangements including two units; three or more units; apartments, condos, etc.

Right-of-Way: Most commonly the dedication of land on which a road or railroad is located and on which passage is permitted.

River Edges Plan: Adopted in 1981 by the Planning Commission. The Grand River Edges Plan helped to raise public awareness and support for increasing and improving public access to, and improvement of, Grand Rapids riverfront areas.

Scale: Refers to how the dimensions of a structure relate to the dimensions of any adjacent structures. Building proportions (length to width to height) should be compatible with surrounding buildings. Building height should be compatible with adjacent structures, especially on the street frontage and at neighborhood edges. The overall form of a building is also important in evaluating the compatibility of new structures.

Site Details: Refers to any enhancement, or special features to a site that increases lighting, visibility, aesthetics, or security. Site details may include lighting, signs, fencing, screening walls, special paving, or awning can help to create a clear identity, visual interest and a sense of human scale. To be effective in promoting compatibility, the choice of site detail elements and the way in which they are used should be coordinated.

Smart Zone: A zone intended to stimulate the growth of technology-based businesses and jobs by aiding in the creation of recognized clusters of new and emerging businesses, those primarily focused on commercializing ideas, patents, and other opportunities surrounding university or private research institute R&D efforts. SmartZones are allowed to capture the growth in property taxes within the boundaries of the zone for use within the zone. All the local property taxes may be captured, and up to 50 percent of school operating taxes may be captured for up to 15 years.

Streetscape: The distinguishing character of a particular street, within the public right-of-way and the adjacent public space extending along both sides of a street, including paving materials, landscaping, sidewalks, parkways, lighting, street furniture and signage.

Street Classification Policy - 1996: A report providing standards and guidelines for how city streets should be used, designed and improved to balance the needs of meeting vehicular travel demand and providing a quality neighborhood environment.

Sub-Regional Mixed-Use Center: A pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development, located on a high frequency service or express transit route, that serves a sub-area of the city (several “villages”) and may also serve areas outside the city.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF): A financing plan to support development of underutilized private properties by capturing a portion of the property tax within a district to fund improvements in the district. When a TIF is established, an existing property tax base is established and all base taxes continue to be collected and transmitted to various government units. As the district develops, the property taxes collected on the increase in tax value for the district (the “tax increment”) is transmitted to the authority and used to pay for specific improvements in the area.

The Right Place Program: The Right Place Program works with area business and community leaders to ensure the economic prosperity of greater Grand Rapids. Services are aimed at retaining and expanding local businesses, as well as attracting new businesses to our community. The Right Place Program works with affiliate service, educational and economic development organizations to serve manufacturers throughout West Michigan and serves as staff to the Urban Redevelopment Council.

Traditional Business Area (TBA): Typically located along transit routes, TBAs included a mix of civic and retail uses at street level, with apartments and/or offices on the upper floors of multi-story buildings. TBAs have structures that are built on the front property line with shared sidewalls (or minimal side yard setbacks). The buildings are typically 2-3 stories in height and sit on relatively narrow lots. Off street parking is limited or located to the rear of the building. As a result, TBAs create a human-scale and pedestrian-friendly environment where retail, jobs and services are available within easy walking distance from many homes.

Traditional Business District: A zoning classification for business districts offering goods and services that meet the daily needs of the neighborhood and other uses that are compatible with adjoining uses. The district’s intent is to protect the traditional character of the business area (i.e. existing commercial structures and lots, including its residential components) and to encourage pedestrian access to and within the business area.

Traffic Calming: Techniques that slow traffic speed to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods and business districts. Examples include: narrower roadways, on-street parking buffers, green barriers, broader crosswalks, roundabouts and speed bumps.

Transit: The movement of people by public conveyance in a high occupancy vehicle, including busses, carpool or vanpools, light rail, streetcars and trains.

Transit Oriented Development (TOD): Mixed-use, higher density development centered on existing or new transit lines that are also designed to create an environment that encourages walking and cycling. Transit-oriented development locates people near transit shopping and services to decrease dependence on driving. The purposes of TOD are to reduce the use of single-occupant vehicles by increasing the

number of times people walk, bicycle, carpool, vanpool, or take transit.

Transitions and Edges: The way different kinds of land uses and development densities relate to one another. In general, gradual transitions in intensity and scale are more compatible than abrupt changes. Incremental changes in density and building scale (height and mass) soften changes in land use and create a more harmonious blend. In some instances, open spaces and landscaping can establish acceptable buffers between developments that are dissimilar in intensity and function.

Typologies: The study, or systematic classification of buildings or neighborhoods by type, age or style.

Urban Business District: A zoning classification for a general commercial district that contains uses, which include the sale of commodities or performance of service for several neighborhoods. The district may also allow certain other uses that are appropriate to the physical design of the existing buildings and are compatible with adjoining uses. The district’s intent is to protect the traditional character of the business area and to encourage pedestrian access to and within the business area.

Urban Redevelopment Council: A council whose vision is to make the City of Grand Rapids the strong “heart” of a strong West Michigan region. The Council advises the city and the Right Place program on strategies to promote business retention, expansion and attraction activities in the city through the productive reuse of land and buildings, while strengthening the collaboration between the city and other units of government in the region.

Variance: A departure from the provisions of a zoning ordinance relating to setbacks, side yards, frontage requirements and lot size that, if applied to a specific lot, would significantly interfere with the use of the property and cause hardship.

Village Mixed-Use Center: A pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development, located on a high frequency service transit route, that serves several neighborhoods.

Voices & Visions: Adopted by the Planning Commission as the Master Plan for Downtown in 1993, this document is a summary report to the community from Voices & Visions: Community Planning for Downtown.

Walkable: A combination of land use planning and urban design characteristics that exist or are created in an area that allow and encourage walking as an alternative to driving.

Zoning: An important tool used in shaping and forming community growth and redevelopment in a manner consistent with the master plan. It regulates various aspects of how land may be used.

Zoning Classification: The name given to types of zones such as single family residential, rural residential, agricultural, regional shopping, neighborhood shopping, office, industrial, etc.

Zoning Ordinance: A zoning ordinance consists of two parts - the district map and the written text. The text sets out the purpose, use and district regulations for each district, the standards for special land uses and for general administration. The zoning map graphically illustrates the zones or districts into which all of the land within the community is classified.